

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 000979

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SUBJECT: IRAQI GC MEMBER AND FRIENDS SHARE VIEWS ON IRAQ

Classified By: Amb. Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) member, Dr. Rajaa H. Khuzai (please protect), and a group of female Iraqi Shi'a, Sunni and Christian friends, expressed to us a mixture of gratitude for the U.S. liberation and criticism for post-liberation mistakes and squandered goodwill. Dr. Khuzai said Iraqis, from all walks of life, are looking for employment, security, and a stable and reliable electricity supply. She added that the U.S. is exacerbating religious tensions in Iraq by focusing on Iraqis' religious backgrounds. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On January 27, PolOff met with Dr. Rajaa H. Khuzai, one of three women on Iraq's GC, who was transiting through Jordan from Egypt on her way back to Iraq. She was joined by several of her well-to-do Amman-based Iraqi friends (her circle of friends included Shi'a, Sunni and Christians.) Dr. Khuzai, a Shi'a married to a Sunni from the Al-Diwanniya area in Iraq, is a well-educated and articulate woman who is a U.K. schooled gynecologist. She said that she felt honored to be on the IGC and wanted to contribute to Iraq's reconstruction and help her fellow Iraqis live in a stable, secure and prosperous Iraq. Her main concern continues to be the unavailability of jobs: 60-70 percent of the population, is unemployed. This situation, she believes, is a destabilizing factor feeding the lack of security in Iraq. Her Iraqi friends around the dinner table all echoed her concerns by saying that creating jobs will "take care of" the Shi'a street demonstrators and give Iraqis hope for a better future.

¶3. (C) They all stressed that the U.S. should do more to integrate the Sunni, Shi'a, Kurd and Christian communities, asserting that most Iraqis are secular by nature. Dr. Khuzai confided that she had recently met with Ayatollah Sistani to gauge his opinion about women's roles in a democratic Iraq. She said he was forthcoming and frank and told her he was open to Iraqi women playing an important role in the future of Iraq. One Jordanian-based friend said she was approached recently and encouraged to organize a Sunni political party. She said she summarily rejected the offer and asked PolOff if the U.S. had a Protestant, Baptist or Roman Catholic political party. Everyone around the table opined that the U.S. is unwittingly perpetuating Saddam's "divide and rule" sectarianism by pitting Iraqi religious sects against each other. All the women said they considered themselves Iraqis first, with their religious affiliations a distant second.

¶4. (C) Dr. Khuzai asserted that there is a widely held perception among Iraqis that CPA Baghdad is demanding a 10 percent cut on all contracts. She alleged that anyone wanting to do business in Iraq goes directly to CPA Baghdad and shuns dealing with Iraqis at the ministries. Businessmen know, she affirmed, "who has the power to close on deals." Most of the other Iraqi women also alleged that service contracts are going to non-Iraqi Arabs, when Iraqis could provide the services at a fraction of the cost.

¶5. (C) Dr. Khuzai and her friends urged the U.S. to initiate an Iraqi satellite station to act as a counterbalance to the disinformation offered by Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyah satellite stations. They argued that Iraq's message is not reaching average Iraqis in Iraq or the Arab world.

¶6. (C) Comment: We offer these views as one slice of Iraqi opinion heard in Amman -- in this case, secular, anti-sectarian, pragmatic, western-oriented -- which cannot be said from this vantage point to reflect a majority view among Iraq's Shi'a.

¶7. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.

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